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MEDIA ALERT:

South Dakota's Veterans' Commission to meet in Sioux Falls

RAPID CITY, S.D. – The South Dakota Veterans' Commission will hold its quarterly meeting this week, Oct. 1-2, in Sioux Falls. The opening session will begin at 9 a.m. (CDT), Wednesday, in the Training Room of the VA Regional Office located at 2501 West 22nd St.

The public is invited to attend the open sessions.

During these quarterly meetings, the commission is presented updated reports from service organizations, state agencies, and the Veterans Administration.

"Everyone on the commission is an advocate of maintaining veterans' benefits and health care," said Michael Birnbaum, commission chairman from Rapid City. "We try to keep a so-called 'pulse' on veterans' issues and concerns in order to advise the state's leaders."

The commission is appointed by the Governor and meets four times a year at different locations throughout the state. According to Birnbaum, South Dakota has about 75,000 veterans.

Wednesday's meeting will highlight Dr. Robert Petzel, director of the Veterans' Integrated Service Network 23. He will address the VISN 23 budget and how a continuing resolution will affect our veterans' health care.

Petzel's presentation will cover Mental Health, PTSD, Substance Abuse, and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI). He will provide the number of veterans, who served in Operations Enduring Freedom/Iraqi Freedom, that have contacted the VA to learn about benefits, the number treated and those on a waiting list for care.

Other topics include the issuance of "Plastic Cards" for veterans' health care, women veteran issues, and rural health care legislation.

On Thursday, Oct. 2, the commissioners will tour the VA Regional Office, VA Medical Center and the Sioux Falls Vet Center beginning at 9 a.m. - spending about 45 minutes at each location.

Members of the South Dakota Veterans' Commission include: Michael Birnbaum, Rapid City, chairman; Bill Locken, Spearfish, vice chairman; Gene Murphy, Sioux Falls; Paul Evenson, Sioux Falls; Don Loudner, Mitchell; and Don Clarke, Wessington.

MEDIA is encouraged to attend and tell the veterans' care story.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, contact Mr. George Summerside, at (605) 773-3518 or Roger Anderson, (605) 737-6268.